



# Small Towns Environment Program

**STEP Washington**



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# What is STEP?

**The *Small Towns Environment Program* (STEP) provides rural communities a method to find reasonable, low-cost solutions to solving wastewater problems.**

STEP is a cooperative partnership among the community, the Department of Ecology, and Rensselaerville Institute of New York (the creator of STEP). All participants are involved from start to finish.

Communities use their own resources — people, material, and financing — to reduce the cost substantially on infrastructure projects required to solve the problems. Solutions focus on what the community can afford and how they can get it done.

## How does it work?

STEP has a different starting place than traditional approaches to project funding and management. Instead of asking, “What will it cost?” communities ask, “What can we afford?” STEP starts with the premise that the best way to get money is to need less of it!

# Will it help my community?

- ***Saves Money.*** When local governments serve as their own general contractor, they avoid paying overhead and profits to outside agents. Local townspeople get involved by volunteering their time to do project tasks — from doing professional planning to laying pipe.
- ***Saves Time.*** When the community actively directs a project and assumes responsibility for it, project timelines can be reduced.
- ***Offers Technical Options.*** Sometimes, simpler and more appropriate solutions not only lower initial costs, but operating and maintenance expenses are reduced as well.
- ***Protects the environment.*** STEP is a cost-effective tool, helping communities protect and safeguard their environment. And for many people, the environment of a small community is the reason they live there.

# What is Ecology's interest?

Partnerships with small communities are an effective way to protect the environment. Every community is facing growth impacts, more demands from state and federal governments, and less funding for natural resource activities.

Local decisions to protect the environment take into account the culture and priorities of the community.

Together we will:

- Identify resources from both inside and outside the community that can assist in specific ways.
- Evaluate alternative wastewater treatment systems.
- Assist community leaders throughout the project.
- Find answers to questions on project management, regulations, and technical issues.
- Learn from the experience of other communities that have been successful in saving \$\$\$ through STEP.

# Who can apply?

Not every community can accomplish a project through self-help. There are a number of criteria Ecology looks for in the community to determine whether self-help will work.

The following questions may help you determine whether your community fits:

- Is there a leader (or several leaders) in the community who can organize and inspire citizens and keep a project on track?
- Do residents have a strong perception of the problem and see the need to correct the problem?
- Are residents willing to participate in the project to help reduce the costs of the project?
- Does the community have the skills, materials, and equipment that can be used on a project?

If your community can answer “yes” to the above points, then you may be a good candidate for the STEP approach.

# Who should I contact?

If you think your community can benefit from participation in STEP Washington, please contact:

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